

Preliminary Summary of Information on the

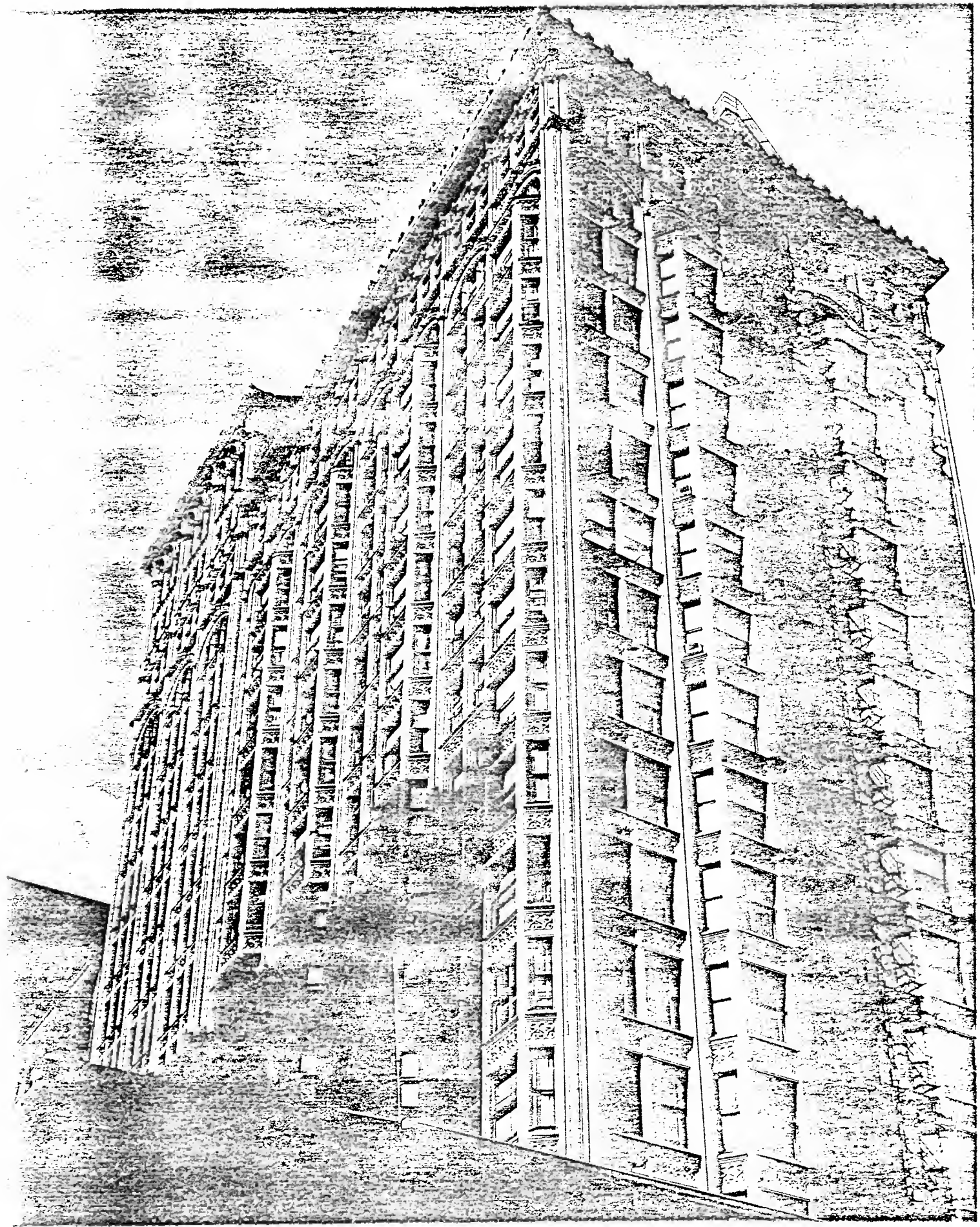
**Fisher Building**  
**Old Colony Building**  
**Manhattan Building**

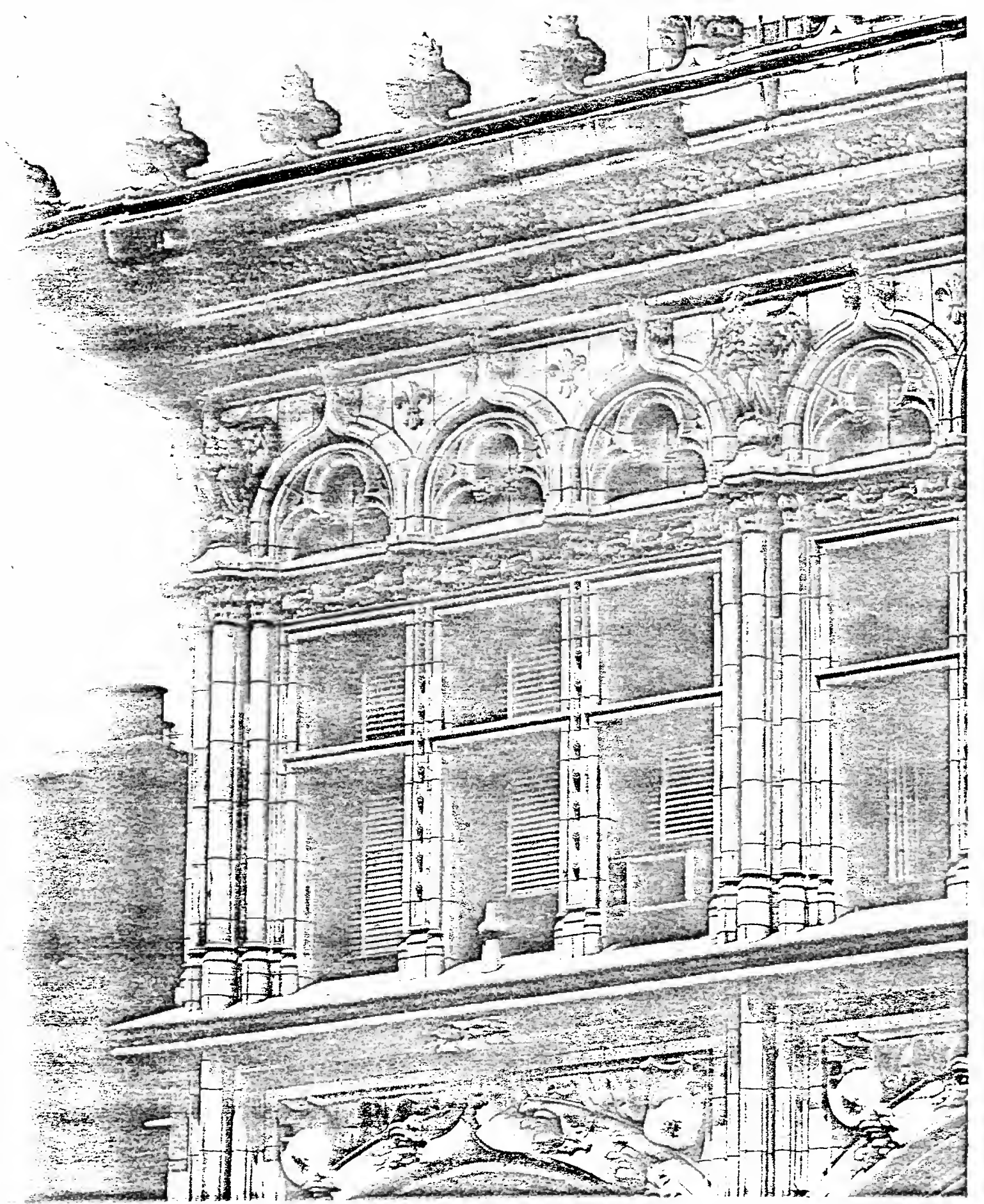
Commission on Chicago Historical and  
Architectural Landmarks

August 6, 1973

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks has received information on the Monadnock Block. The enclosed summaries contain information on the remaining three structures which together with the Monadnock Block will constitute the South Dearborn Street District.

Information considering these structures in the context of a district will be forthcoming.





Fisher Building  
343 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Date of Construction: 1895-96

Architect: D.H. Burnham & Company

The Fisher Building, as it exists today, is composed of two distinct sections. The original portion of the building fronting on Van Buren, 8 bays deep and 18 stories high, was built in 1895-6 by D.H. Burnham & Co.; while an annex to the north, 3 bays wide and 20 stories high, was added in 1907 by architect Peter J. Weber, closely following the original design.

The Fisher Building is of special interest not only because of its location in the world-famous South Dearborn Street ensemble of buildings, but also because of its close relationship to the Reliance Building, completed a short while earlier. The Fisher has remained rather obscure compared to its elder brother, largely because of the recent bias of architects and historians against historical detailing of any sort; typical comments include Arthur Siegel's statement that the design is "hardly inferior to the Reliance Building".

Both buildings document the direction in which commercial architecture was going in the late 1890s, following the lead of the Chicago School, before development was cut short by the introduction of neo-Classical ideas in the years following the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The "style" of the Fisher Building is Gothic, making this one of the earliest examples of the application of Gothic to commercial buildings, a practice which was later to result in such works as the Tribune Tower and the Woolworth Building (New York), and which was to form one of the bases for the Art Deco "Vertical Style" skyscrapers of the late 1920s.

The overall design of the Fisher is extremely express-



ionistic; the building strongly expresses its verticality and, in fact, relates closely to Louis Sullivan's ideas on skyscraper design, historical ornament notwithstanding. It may be interestingly compared to Sullivan's own Guaranty Building in Buffalo (1895) and especially to his later Bayard Building in New York (1898).

The first renderings of this building were published in the Inland Architect magazine of June, 1895, a fact which seems to indicate that Charles Atwood, at that time in charge of design for D.H. Burnham & Co. and the designer of the famed Reliance Building, had a significant and possibly major role in the building's development. Atwood himself, always in poor health, dies in December of 1895 as the building was being finished. A comparison of the Reliance and the Fisher reveals some very interesting similarities and differences.

Both buildings are essentially a steel frame covered with terra-cotta sheathing for fireproofing and protection against the elements, and both have astonishingly large amounts of window area. The Fisher itself was heralded in an article in the May, 1896 issue of Inland Architect as a "Building Without Walls". Unlike the Reliance which has two unfinished sides covered by brick, the Fisher has three "formal" facades (facing VanBuren, Dearborn, and Plymouth Court) of glass and terra-cotta, and a rear wall (to the north) with an infill of hollow building tile. The only brick used in the building is that which backs some of the terra-cotta panels.

Both the Reliance and the Fisher seem to mark some sort of tentative steps which the office of D.H. Burnham & Co., presumably under Atwood's leadership, was making in the development of an inexpensive, quickly erected, and easily maintained office structure. The Reliance was constructed with great rapidity; at one point, 6 stories of steelwork were erected in 12 days. The Fisher surpassed even this record, however, with 17 stories of steelwork being completed in a month.

Structurally, the two buildings are similar, an un-

surprising fact since E.C. Shankland, one of the partners in D.H. Burnham's company, was in charge of plans, engineering and construction for both buildings. The Fisher featured an advance in its foundations, however, in the form of 25 foot piles under the spread foundations to consolidate the soil. A time-span of slightly over 9 months elapsed between the ground-breaking and the first tenants entering the building.

The terra-cotta facings on both the buildings were considered innovations, the Reliance having glazed white terra-cotta and the Fisher having terra-cotta of a pale salmon color with a "spattered" surface.

The most interesting comparison between the two buildings, however, lies in their stylistic differences. It is important to note the personality of Charles Atwood in both of these designs; he evidently gave great consideration to functional matters, but was still firmly entrenched in historicist ideas of design or at least detailing. Thus the two buildings are, in fact, modern, functional designs composed largely of traditional details. Both the Fisher and the Reliance are "Gothic" in their ornamental detailing, although the Reliance must be considered an experiment to create a more "classic" sort of skyscraper, or one which is relatively at rest and composed. Thus, for example, the Reliance facades are interplays between horizontal and vertical elements, and the whole was originally capped by a slab cornice.

The Fisher, on the other hand, is dominated by vertical elements. The major vertical piers run uninterrupted through the main portion of the building and unite to form an arcade motif on the 17th floor. The windows are all conventional double-hung units separated by minor piers which continue through the spandrels and which are interrupted only by moldings at each window's sill level. Each projecting trapezoidal bay is relatively narrow and contains only one frontally facing window per floor (as opposed to 3 in the Reliance) which further serves to give the building vertical emphasis.

Of special interest are the treatments of the upper

stories of both buildings, and the methods used for "ending" or "topping" the designs. The Reliance features a transitional attic story obviously intended to give a freize-like effect and a slab cornice which originally capped the whole design. The main body of the Fisher, however, terminates with an arcade motif and is topped by a transitional 18th story which creates the same effect as the attic story of the Reliance. The Fisher's attic story is, however, topped by another elaborately ornamented arcade above which is a stepped cornice decorated with foliate designs and finials. If one looks carefully at the conception of the design, it becomes evident that the much-maligned incrustations of ornament were introduced for a definite purpose-- the "dematerialization" of the surface.

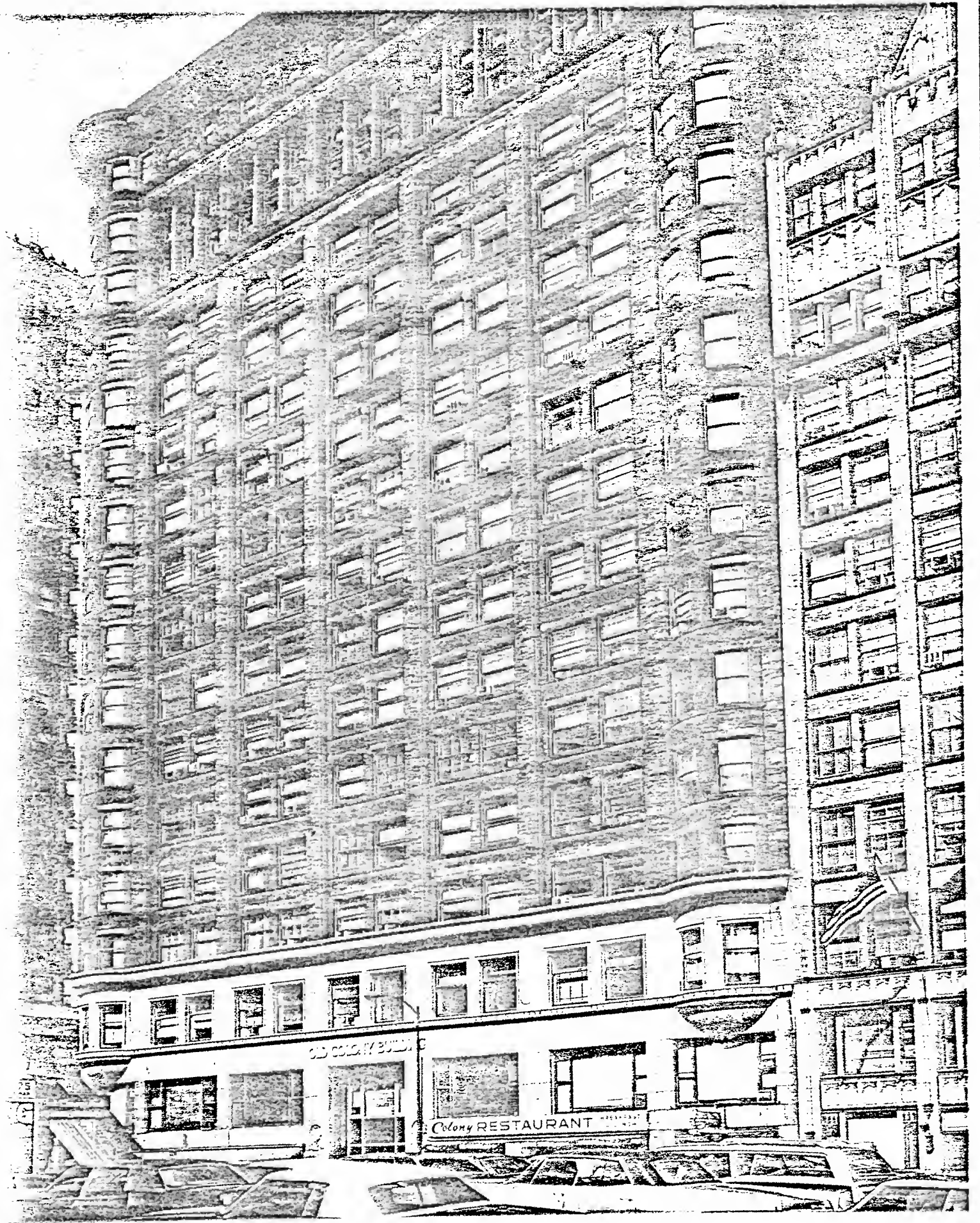
In the main body of the building, for example, the vertical piers are simply expressed, while the main horizontal elements, the spandrels, are elaborately ornamented, effectively minimizing the banding effect which would be created by unadorned surfaces. The dematerialization effect is especially noticeable in the upper floors where, apparently, great effort is made to reduce the visual weight of the cornice. The Fisher does not simply abruptly stop at its summit like the Reliance, but terminates in a flurry of ornamental detail, much like certain Gothic cathedrals; the same effect may be noted in Sullivan's 1898 Bayard Building.

The ornament itself, according to an 1896 article in Inland Architect, is "taken from the 15th Century Gothic of Rouen and Burges...", and, at least on the lower floors, is studded with crabs, fish, and shells, visual puns on the name of the original owner, Lucius G. Fisher. The upper floors are studded with a fantastic repertory of designs, including trefoil and ogee arches, drapery, foliate patterns, salamanders, and even eagles.

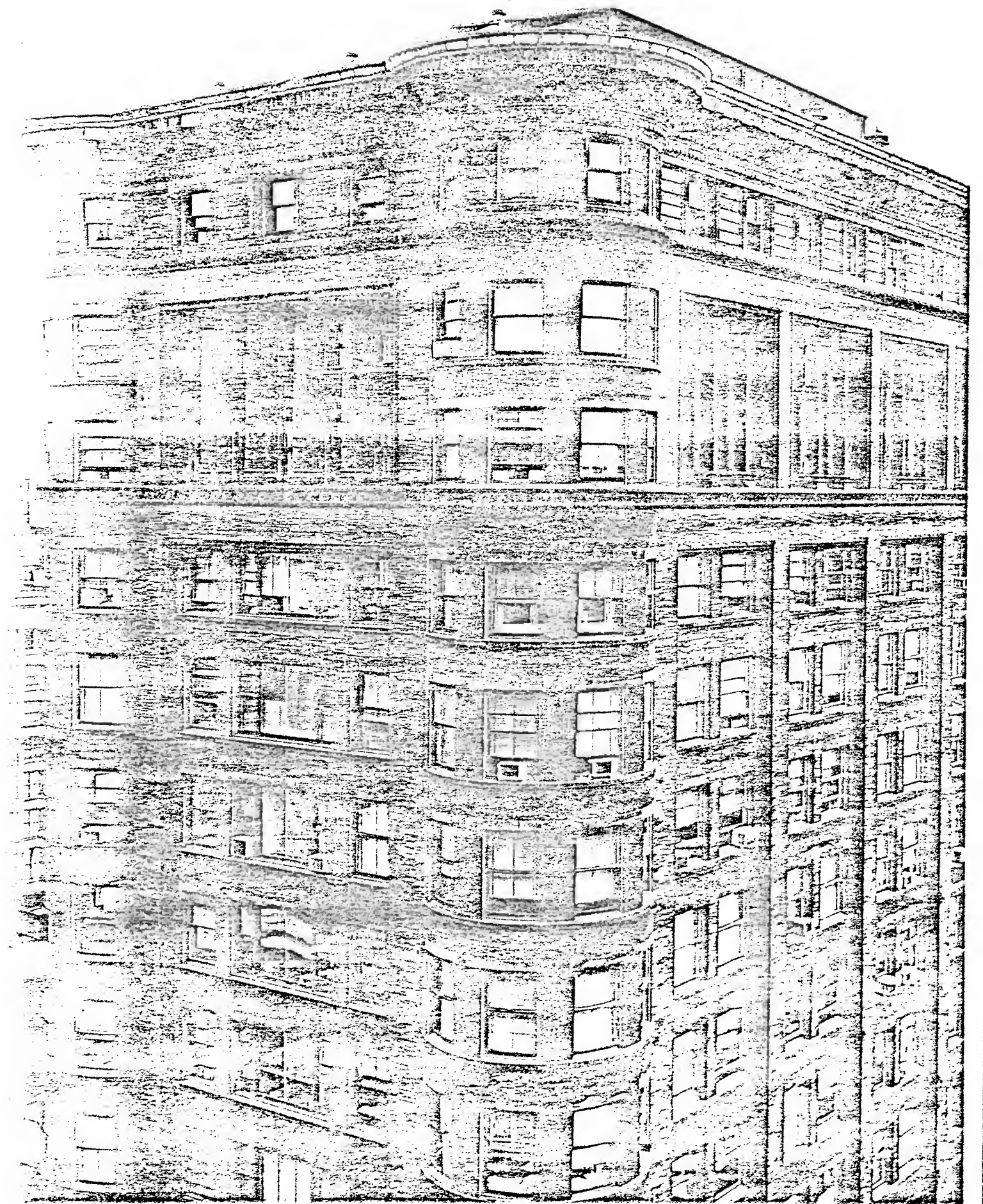
The 1907 addition follows the lines of the original section. It is two stories taller, however, and contains no projecting bays. The upper floors are somewhat simplified, and the whole is topped by a pattern of trefoils, intersecting arched tracery, and foliate designs which unite to form an elaborate cornice.

The building today exists in good condition and in a largely unaltered form. Recent modifications have included extensive remodellings of the ground floor. For the most part, these remodellings, although in some cases rather inappropriate, do not extend above the first floor. The original Van Buren Street lobby has been converted into a small store. Blackened with soot and grime for many years, the building has recently been cleaned, exposing the original light salmon coloration of the terra-cotta.

The Fisher building marks the end of creative experimentation by the firm of D.H. Burnham & Co. With the curiously progressive-traditional designer Charles Atwood gone, the firm reverted, with great success, at least in the opinion of most contemporaries, to a more or less literal application of neo-Classic ideas to commercial structures. The experiment begun with the Reliance and the Fisher was never finished.









OLD COLONY BUILDING  
407 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Date of Construction: 1893-94

Architects: Holabird and Roche

Erected between 1893 and 1894 by Francis Bartlett of Boston, the Old Colony originally cost over \$900,000. The land underneath it, on the southeast corner of Dearborn and Van Buren, was purchased in 1884 by Bartlett through Bryan Lathrop for \$116,000. Lathrop, incidentally, was the owner of the officially designated BRYAN LATHROP HOUSE, now the Fortnightly Club.

Seventeen stories tall, or approximately 215 feet high, the Old Colony extends five bays on its east and west elevations by one bay on the north and south. Flanking these bays are full rounded oriels on the northeast and northwest corners, partially rounded oriels on the southeast and southwest. It is because of these oriels that the Old Colony emerges so strongly differentiated from the other South Dearborn district buildings.

The building fronts onto Dearborn, Van Buren and Plymouth Court, and only these three elevations exhibit finished facades. The first, second, third and 17th stories are faced with smooth, blue Bedford stone. The fourth through 16th floors are surfaced with cream colored Roman brick, now terribly discolored and dirty as is the limestone base. Ornamental trim, used sparingly, is white terra cotta.

The building is visually organized into a base-shaft-capital scheme as was common practice at the time, architects seeming compelled to design a distinct beginning and end for their buildings. Extremely large Chicago windows are found on the second floor, and on the north elevation from the second through the 14th

floors. There is a two-story colonnade at the 15th and 16th stories. The original cornice remains intact.

The general thrust of the building is undoubtedly vertical, with continuous piers and the elongated corner bays and the tapered columns of the upper level colonnade all adding emphasis to this upward orientation. The Dearborn and Plymouth Court frontages are slightly more than twice the length of the Van Buren facade, establishing the slab-like character and at the same time posing a severe design problem involving proportions. Carl Condit notes:

The continuous piers of the long elevations produce an unobtrusive vertical accent. This is reversed in the narrow north elevation, where the continuous sills and lintels of the separate window groups provide a marked horizontality. One can see that the architects were attempting to contract the apparent width of the long elevations and to expand that of the narrow.

The general appearance of the Old Colony is that of a well-proportioned and considerably dignified building. Yet it may be that a great share of the building's importance and innovation stems from its structural system. The skeletal frame combines a curious mixture of both novel and familiar technologies. Columns are wrought-iron Phoenix columns of the type used in American construction for 30 years. The girders and floor beams, however, are of steel, then still a relatively new material to the building trades.

Engineer Corydon T. Purdy further established his capability by virtually inventing a new system of windbracing. It must be mentioned that, until this time, windbracing had not evolved into the literal science so familiar to us today. In the Old Colony Purdy conceived of a unique portal bracing whereby the main girder joins the column by means of a deep fillet, giving the girder an archlike soffit.

Condit indicates that while portal frames of railway

truss bridges may have provided the precedent, the Old Colony might well represent the first application of this particular system to building frames. Just as the "tube" system perfected by Dr. Fazlur Khan is unique to the 1960s and 70s, so too were portal arches in the 1890s.

Party walls and unequal settlement posed considerable temporary setbacks during construction. A signed statement affirming the party wall strength of a seven story building immediately to the south was highly inaccurate, and soon after construction began on the Old Colony the wall shifted measurably until it leaned over the lot line of the Old Colony.

The only feasible solution was one that had been used four years earlier for the neighboring Manhattan: the south line of columns had to be carried on cantilevers anchored to the columns of the adjacent line. But the solution in this case brought more trouble: because of extremely high load concentrations on the second line of columns, the south end of the long, narrow building settled more than the north end. The designers called in as a consultant the bridge engineer William Sooy Smith, who solved the problem by jacking up the south end and introducing four hardpan caissons under the column footings at the anchor ends of the cantilevers, in this way equalizing the settlement at 4 3/16 inches all around...In 1947 hardpan caissons were introduced under the west column footings...in connection with the extension of the Dearborn Street subway south of Van Buren Street. (Condit, The Chicago School of Architecture)

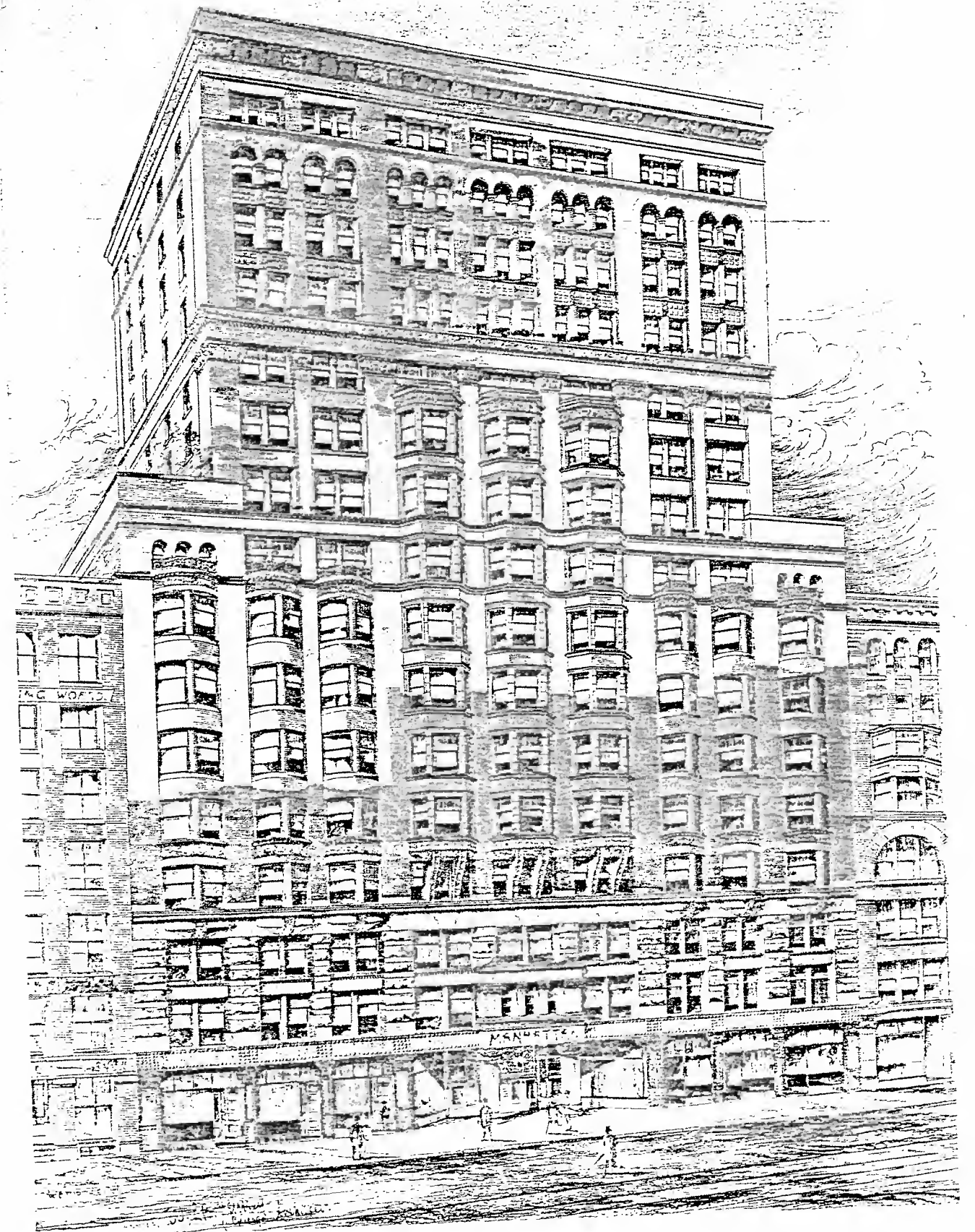
At each of the three original entrances (the main entrance on Van Buren is now sealed up and the entries off Dearborn and Plymouth Court have been remodelled) are facsimilies of the seal of the pilgrim's Plymouth colony, which was known as the "Old Colony." It is from this tradition that both the building and the street to the east are named.

Most of the interior was at one time surfaced with attractive mosaic tiles, rich woods and fine marbles, some of which still remain on the floors which have not been thoroughly "modernized."

An 1894 account of the building written by Joseph and Caroline Kirkland acclaims the Old Colony in these terms:

Even the most stoical of us is affected in a greater or less degree by his surroundings and the man whose daily business life is passed in such a stately, beautiful and perfect building as the Old Colony cannot but be strengthened and stimulated by the atmosphere of tranquil completeness...

(9)



COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

MANHATTAN BUILDING.

ROMANESQUE PRESS.

MANHATTAN BUILDING  
431 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Date of construction: 1891

Architect: William LeBaron Jenney

The Manhattan Building, designed by William LeBaron Jenney for C. C. Heissen, opened in the summer of 1891. The original building permit was issued in June of 1889. The Manhattan is reputed to be the first 16 story building constructed in the world. The north half of the Monadnock Block, also 16 stories, was under construction at the same time, although it was completed after the Manhattan. It is significant to note that the Monadnock was a masonry bearing-wall structure while the Manhattan was a true skeleton frame building.

The building encompasses a central 16-story block flanked by a nine-story wing on either side. Grey granite faces the first five stories on both Dearborn and Plymouth Court; pressed brick and terra cotta are found above. The north and south elevations have unfinished facades above the eighth floor.

Like the Old Colony, the framing system of the Manhattan incorporates a number of structural innovations in combination with traditional materials. Cast iron was used for the columns and wrought iron for secondary girders and beams. Steel, however, was used in the main girders and joists and in the channels for spandrel beams.

Several sources support the fact that the Manhattan was the first building to recognize the necessity for and include a planned system for windbracing. The engineer Louis E. Ritter, who worked in cooperation with Jenney on this job, utilized not only diagonal bracing but also a primitive form of portal bracing.

The Manhattan was also the first building to incorporate



an extensive series of floor cantilevers. According to Carl Condit:

Jenney and Ritter had to face the problem of dangerously overloading the party walls and footings of the two low buildings that originally flanked the Manhattan. Ritter solved it by carrying the floors along the outer bays of the side elevations on cantilever beams anchored to the columns located on the second column line inside the planes of the party walls. Variations on this method of cantilevering the floor slab beyond the outermost line of columns came to be common in buildings with continuous or ribbon openings.

The building itself has two virtually identical facades--one on Dearborn Street, the other on Plymouth Court. The main facade is, however on Dearborn and features some rather interesting ornament, involving smiling and frowning masks, as well as foliate motifs. The ornamentation is lush and vigorous, but applied sparingly. It is interesting to compare the Dearborn Street front with that on Plymouth Court, which is, again, virtually identical, with the exception of being almost devoid of applied ornament. The overall treatment of the facade clearly shows the difficulty early Chicago architects had in adapting to the new, unprecedented tall buildings. The design is divided into a series of stages, creating an effect similar to a number of shorter buildings stacked atop each other. The extremely prominent cornice at the 12th story once, in fact, led to the erroneous supposition that the 4 stories above were added later.

The most noticeable feature of the Manhattan Building is its profusion of bay windows. Their presence has occasionally been criticized for creating an "effect of indecision," but they were, in fact incorporated in the design for extremely practical reasons. At roughly the same time that the Manhattan was being constructed, work on two other (now demolished) buildings, the 13 story Monon Building, and the 12-story Caxton Building, was also underway immediately across Dearborn Street. Jenney, obviously concerned about obtaining adequate light in the

Manhattan offices with two considerable skyscrapers towering across the street, projected bay windows out from the wall to capture as much illumination as possible. Above the 12th floor level, where the light was unobstructed, there was obviously no need for projecting bays, and thus the front was flat. There was also the obvious attraction of obtaining a considerable amount of extra floor space through the use of projecting bays. The combination of trapezoidal and triangular bays into one design does produce an effect which, although it may appear "indecisive" is undoubtedly lively.

The Manhattan Building is, therefore, a notable pioneering skeletal frame design which, with its combination of structural innovation and functional, pragmatic design, is one of the most significant and famous early works of the Chicago School.